

Lawmakers insist Inslee's death-penalty decree ignores families of victims

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OLYMPIA - In the hour prior to a public hearing on Senate Bill 6566 this past Wednesday, Sen. Steve O'Ban again called for Gov. Jay Inslee to reach out and listen to the victims before imposing a blanket moratorium on executions in Washington.

Surrounded by numerous family members and friends of those murdered by some of the nine men on death row, the Pierce County Republican held a news conference drawing attention to what he described as the governor's inappropriate and unilateral use of power.

"It was terribly presumptuous of the governor to announce a statewide suspension of death-row executions without even speaking with the victims' families," said O'Ban, who represents the 28th Legislative District.

"His office does not give him the authority to, by executive order, grant an across-the-board reprieve. It's disrespectful to the family members of the victims whose opinions must be considered under existing law."

SB 6566 would prohibit a governor from exercising his or her powers of clemency prior to receiving a recommendation from the state Clemency and Pardons Board. Specifically, the bill states the governor may, on good cause shown, grant respites or reprieves from time to time, meaning that he or she has undergone an individualized consideration of the facts of a specific conviction after he or she has received a recommendation from the clemency and pardons board.

"The governor committed a new form of injustice by failing to consult with the families of victims and prosecutors before making his decision," O'Ban added. "My bill will ensure that future governors are required to adhere to the process established by the people of the state of Washington, and will reassure victims' families that their voices will be heard through the state Clemency and Pardons Board."

Also speaking at the Feb. 26 news conference was Sen. Janéa Holmquist Newbry, who earlier in the week drew attention to the governor's apparent insensitivity by pointing to the fact that all of the victims of the inmates on death row were either women or children.

"This is one of the most insensitive acts I have ever seen from a governor," said Holmquist Newbry (R-Moses Lake).

"Washington has nine offenders on death row and each and every one of them was convicted of murdering a woman or young children. Governor Inslee should be ashamed of himself for putting the

interests of murderers and rapists ahead of the safety and emotional well-being of their victims,” said the Moses Lake lawmaker.

If approved by the Senate Law and Justice Committee, SB 6566 would likely be referred to the Senate budget committee to evaluate its fiscal impacts.